

# Unwavering Confidence in God

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*Mark*

By Dalton Teal

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I do want to say before we begin, as has been said multiple times during this service, a happy Mother's Day to all of our mothers here. You are so vitally important, not only to our church and your family, but to me as well. I want to wish a happy Mother's Day, even though my mom is not here, I know she will be watching the live stream later on. So I want to wish a happy Mother's Day to her. My mom is someone that is so important to me in my life. She has loved and cared for me for my entire 27 years of existence. She gave me life. She has taught me so much. Before I read from Mark 6, I want to read just a few words from 2 Timothy 1. You don't have to turn there. 2 Timothy 1, starting in verse 5, Paul says, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well." This is a testimony to mothers and grandmothers everywhere of your faithfulness, how your faith in the Lord is carried to your families. It is also a charge to shepherd your families well, to care for your children, to honor the Lord by making Christ known in their hearts. For me, my mother did that and my grandmother did that. I can remember my grandmother, who has been hard of hearing my entire life, which led to many pranks on my part, she would walk around the house as if no one knew she was even there, singing hymns and singing Scripture. I have many songs that I will get stuck in my head from time to time and wonder, "Where did that come from?" And then I am reminded of my grandmother walking around the house singing it. My mother taught me a lot. She even taught me how to drive a stick shift and there were many tears that day. And I really wish I could say it was when I was 16 years old, but I was not. My mom is incredibly gracious and wonderful. She has impacted my life so much and so we do want to honor mothers this morning.

I also want to take a second to say two different things. First of all, I am up here for a reason and that is because Pastor Ty is not here. We do want to congratulate our pastor. He just graduated on Friday from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. [applause] Yes, you can cheer for him. He is not here and I don't think he's watching either. I'm pretty sure he's actually at the church that I came from this morning, worshiping with the saints at Kosmosdale, but he graduated with his doctorate. It has been a long time coming and we are so excited that he has done it. So I am up here for that purpose.

But I also want to say thank you to all of you who prayed for me last weekend. For those of you that don't know, last weekend I was out because I was officiating a wedding for a cousin of mine. What you most likely don't know is that, let's see, last Tuesday I left the office with a fever of 102 and then Wednesday tested positive for flu B. I am clear now. I am not contagious, I promise. I'm healthy-ish. But the wedding was a struggle. I had no voice, I had no strength, but the Lord was incredibly gracious and answered your prayers and so I thank you for that.

Our time this morning is going to start in Mark 6, though that will not be where we spend most of our time. We are going to be looking at the life and death of John the Baptist this morning. It's actually unique as I will be preaching the next few weeks, so if attendance starts to drop next week, I'll know why. But we'll be looking at the life and death of John the Baptist over a few weeks and considering his faithfulness. The title of this message is "Unwavering Confidence in God." So I will read starting in verse 14 and then we will pray.

14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "He is Elijah." And others said, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you." 23 And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 And she went out and said to her mother, "For what should I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." 25 And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison 28 and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

*Almighty God, we are humbled as we approach this text, as we consider the life and testimony of John the Baptist and the way that it ended. But Lord, we're not necessarily humbled by the way that it ended so much as his confidence in you, how even in the midst of great persecution, great trial, and great danger, he stood upon your word. He had an unwavering confidence in your power, even if it meant that his life was about to end. So God, teach us through John, teach us through his life, what it means to stand firm in your word, what it means to be people with unwavering confidence. God, help us. Lord, give my voice and my body the strength to endure and get me out of the way so that your name might be magnified. We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I'm going to be chugging water, by the way. I'm just warning you now.

In an article written in the Columbian Metro a few years ago, readers were introduced to an incredibly important historical figure who had ripple effects that we are experiencing today. The article reads,

"On Oct. 31, 1517, a little-known priest and university professor made his way past the gathering crowd toward the large double doors of All Saints Church in the border town of Wittenberg, Saxony (modern-day Germany). In one hand, he held a lengthy, hand-written list of 95 points of contention he hoped to debate about the church he loved. In the other, he likely had a hammer.

At the door, people were milling about as usual, though the crowds were larger than normal. It was the eve of All Saints Day — All Hallows Eve — and Wittenberg's citizenry, as well as those living in the countryside, converged on the town, specifically around the church. All were preparing for the significant Roman Catholic feast day to follow.

Posting announcements and various other notices and bulletins on the church doors was not uncommon in these days, especially for professors like Luther who were teaching at nearby Wittenberg University. While it is possible that his sole aim was, at this point, to engage in academic debate, Luther was also surely aware that the larger crowds gathered for All Saints Day meant a larger audience.

Luther quickly walked up to the church entrance and began nailing his list to the door and immediately heads began to turn toward him.

Now it is believed that Luther's intent with the list, his officially '95 theses,' was not to start a revolution but rather to stir up debate. He wanted to get people talking and thinking about at least partially reforming some of the extra-Biblical church traditions and church-instituted teachings and activities that he believed had no basis in Scripture. He feared that those traditions and teachings lulled Christians into erroneous beliefs that salvation could be achieved through good works or, worse, church-sanctioned indulgences, which he viewed as purchased merit. Luther argued that the Scriptures were clear, and that salvation was achieved by

'faith alone,' with good works being the fruit of that faith as opposed to a means to reaching heaven.

And he wanted to please God, and he struggled mightily with the fact that he believed he would never be able to achieve righteousness through his daily strivings, often spending his time in the priesthood in the confessional, hours on end. His eyes, however, were opened when he read in Romans 1, 'The righteous shall live by faith.' Therein lies the heart of Luther's theology."

Now this is where the story takes a turn.

"Word quickly spread of Luther's 95 theses, aided by Johannes Gutenberg's revolutionary new movable-type printing press. The list went viral with that era's newest technology, and the church recognized the gravity of this situation; this had potentially changed everything, and ultimately Luther's life was very much in danger.

For the next three years, Luther was urged to recant his '95 theses,' and his other writings and teachings and ye he refused. The church was fast running out of options as to what to do with this German troublemaker. In January 1521, he was excommunicated by the Pope. By mid-April, he found himself answering allegations of heresy at the now-famous Diet of Worms, an assembly of princes and prelates often overseen by the Holy Roman Emperor, with the strong possibility that the 37-year-old excommunicant would be burned at the stake."

This was a dangerous time for Luther, a dangerous time. He had spoken out against the church. He had nailed his 95 theses to the door. He had defended them. He had written against everything that they had taught and tried to sell, but now his life was on the line. Recant or die. Luther was, again, given an opportunity to save himself. All he had to do was "recant," all he had to do was say, "I was wrong," and his life would have continued on. These are the words that he responded to when they said, "recant."

"My conscience is captive to the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me."

Now, I've heard this story dozens of times, probably hundreds of times, whether it was from pulpits or conference rooms, classrooms, or just in conversation. I have several copies of "Here I Stand" in my office. I've heard it dozens of times. The story of Luther is well known. A lot of the reason why we're here today is because of what he did. But what I find most fascinating about him is not his oratory skills or his writing or his hymn writing. What I have found most fascinating about Luther is his confidence in God. And it sounds like a simple thing to latch onto, right? There's so much that the man has done. The 95 theses, I should be fascinated by that. His recovery of justification by faith alone. The many wonderful hymns that he had. And yes, they are all important. They are crucial. He had recovered so much for us that the church had lost. But at the center of

everything that he did was a belief that God was in control of all things, the confidence that God would carry him no matter the cost.

He did not believe in taking what he knew about God and then sitting idly by while people were led to error. He refused to divorce his understanding of God from his obedience to God. But unfortunately there is a growing trend in evangelicals today who are okay with being incredible intellects and yet totally lethargic. Let me put it a different way: you can have all of the knowledge in the world and yet be totally useless for the kingdom of God. Now that is a harsh critique, a harsh statement, but if we have knowledge without action, we don't really believe in what we say we believe, do we? If your understanding of God and his word does not lead to faithful obedience, then you likely do not know him at all. Having an unwavering confidence in the character and the power and the glory and the might of the most high God leads us to action. You cannot divorce knowledge from obedience.

So our purpose this morning is simple, is to look at the example of John the Baptist whose confidence was so unshakable and so unwavering that he was willing to risk everything to make God known. My goal is to help you and I be people that are not lethargic and puffed up by the pride of knowledge, rather to be people of action, people of action fueled by a confidence in our great God. With that said, let's look at the account of the life of John the Baptist, or as other people have told me, John the Baptizer, looking at a certain person right now, John the Baptizer and learn from his example of a life that was marked by faithfulness.

Now something that I found very interesting, that none of the gospels actually give an account of the death of John the Baptist in real time. So our passage is not even a real time account. It's a flashback. We're looking back at the death of John the Baptist. As we will see later, this real time information we have on John, the last real time information we have is actually when he's in prison for what we find out in this passage, but we don't actually find out in real time, this is when he died and this is how he died. We just kind of get a flashback and a glimpse.

Our passage actually begins in verse 14 where it says, "King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known." Now what did he hear? If you look back at the context of the last few chapters, Jesus had been healing a great number, he was rejected at Nazareth and then he sends out the twelve, and in verse 12 of chapter 6 it says, "So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent and they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." So Jesus and the twelve are going out and ministering. They're proclaiming a message of repentance. They're doing many signs and wonders and Herod hears of it. He gets word of it. He finds out something's going on and, "I want to find out what it is."

Now I find it interesting and we'll spend more time next week kind of looking at Herod and thinking about his sins and his failures, but I find it interesting just where his brain immediately goes. They hear about Jesus and what he is doing and what the 12 are doing and his response is, "Well, the guy that I just beheaded, whose head that I saw on a silver platter, must have come back to life." Just the strangeness of that. That he was so

convinced that this guy that he was afraid of and that he had beheaded came back to life. But the context is actually the ministry of Jesus which brings up and gives us the information about John's death, but in order to understand John's confidence in this moment, we must ask the question: who is this John? Who is this John? So the first thing we will see is that John had a life of devotion.

Now as is usual when I preach, we're going to be going to a lot of different places. So just sword drills, if you practice them, they're going to come in handy right now. Turn with me to Luke 1. Luke 1. We're going to walk through a timeline of the life of John starting from when his birth is foretold. Luke 1 starting in verse 5.

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, of the division of Abijah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.

Let's skip down to verse 13. An angel has just appeared to Zechariah,

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. 14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [this is where it's important,] 15 for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

This child that is not yet born yet, has already been given his assignment, his job, to prepare a way. So this is going to be a very important child. He's going to have a very important task to prepare the way for the Lord, and as we will find out in just a moment, he does just that.

Now let's skip forward a little bit in Luke 1. We're going to go to verse 57, and as you flip there, I just want to make mention of when Mary visits Elizabeth because immediately after the angel visits Zechariah and tells him that, "You are going to have a son even though you're old and barren," then the birth of Jesus is foretold and it's important that these two things happen back-to-back because John would be the one that would prepare for Jesus to come. And in verse 39, we see that Mary goes to visit Elizabeth. Verse 44, as they are having a conversation, Elizabeth blesses her. She says, "behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." He's not even born yet and he knows who this one is. He knows what his task is to be. And now we're in verse 57.

57 Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." ...62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring [remember that Zechariah at this point cannot speak] inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea.

Let's just stop for a moment and I don't understand relatives sometimes. Like in this moment, this miraculous birth, and it is a miraculous birth because she was older and barren for her entire life, then she says, "His name is John," and everyone ignores her, even though she just carried the child and said, "So what do you want his name to be?" I don't, I don't get the questioning here. Like it's her child. She has the right to do so, but she was following the command of the Lord. Right? The angel said, "Name him John." So then they turned to Zechariah and say, "Okay, what do you want him named? Do you want him to have your name?" "No, his name is John." This is his name because he has a purpose. He has been placed on this earth for a purpose. And then Zechariah praises God because he has miraculously given them a child, he has provided abundantly for them, but most of all, he praises them for what he knew his child was going to be doing. Look with me at his prophecy that follows.

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And this is where it transitions. He looks to his son and says,

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins,

This is an important child. Just imagine Zechariah holding his newborn son, the one that he had longed for, the one that he had often prayed for, and the one that quite possibly he might have given up on and said, "Well, we're not going to have a child and that's okay." And then the Lord provides abundantly and immediately holding his son in his hands, he praises God that salvation is about to come and looks at the child and says, "You will be a

prophet of the Most High." That's a lot of pressure and yet this child would have a very important job as we will continue.

Now this is where we have a gap in the story. So we're foretold of the birth from the angel, and then the birth happens, and then the prophecy happens, and then nothing. It just goes quiet for a while, which really bugs me because I'm curious what his childhood was like. I mean, John was not the most ordinary human being as we will later find out. He went out into the wilderness. He wore camel skin clothing. Like my mom told me to go and play outside a lot, "Go outside and play with your sister." Did they tell him to go play in the wilderness and he just didn't come back? Like there's a lot of questions that we have of this text. And at what point did he show back up with locusts and was he dipping it in the honey? There's just a lot there. Incredibly strange account. He was not the most normal of people, but he actually followed after the line of prophets.

So he goes to the wilderness and turn with me really quickly back over to the gospel of Mark 1. This is where John's ministry begins and we're going to find out is he actually what the angel said and what his father said he would be? Mark 1, starting in verse 1,

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" 4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Let's think for just a moment what has led up to this point, right? So let's even backtrack really far to the exodus. So Israel is in captivity. They are slaves to Egypt and God sends his chosen servant Moses to lead them out, to lead them into the land of the promise, and so they leave Egypt and they go into the wilderness. This is the first account of the redemption and restoration of Israel that would be following several times after. So they go into the wilderness. We fast forward again. They stay there for a while because they sin against the Lord and they need to be redeemed. God leads them into the land of promise and yet they continue to sin against him. Time and time again God would redeem and restore Israel, they would sin against him and then there would be a judgment against them. He would send them into captivity. He would send prophets that would tell of their coming captivity and destruction, how they had sinned against the Lord and they were going to be judged for it, and time and time again the wilderness is an important theme. They are sent to the wilderness. They are redeemed in the wilderness. Prophets are in the wilderness. And then quiet. Just 400 years of quiet. Nothing is really



happening. Israel is being judged by the Lord but God is preparing something to come. The quotation here is from Isaiah and it's also actually from Malachi as well but Isaiah is the larger portion and they quote, Mark quotes from Isaiah who was prophesying about what was to come. He says, "I send my messenger before you who will prepare your way," and we find out that John is that messenger. So he is the one that was longed for by the prophets. He is a fulfillment of the prophets that had spoken of a coming salvation from the wilderness.

So John is now out in the wilderness. He has been crying out, proclaiming and it's one essential message over and over and over again, "Repent and believe for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That's his message, "Repent," because he realizes that Israel has sinned against the Lord. All have sinned against the Lord in fact, and the only way of hope is to repent. Now we talk about repentance with our kids a lot on Wednesday night in Adventure Club. Repentance is the concept that we recognize our sin, we confess our sin to the Lord and we turn from it. It is an action.

So they were to repent, to turn from their sins but he doesn't say, "and believe in me." Right? He's not a false prophet. He says, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. There is one that is coming that is greater than I am." And we find that to be the case and I'm so just blown away by the humility of John. Right? There's prophecies given about him, that he was going to play a very important role, and yet he says, "After me comes one who is mightier than I am, whose strap of his sandal I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." John is a very humble man. He was the one that was promised. He knew all of the prophecies. He knew what God was working towards. He had a task and he had a job, and yet it didn't lead him to pride. It didn't lead him to saying, "I am the prophet that is about to usher in the one who is to come." He didn't boast in himself. He boasted in God. He relied on the word of God. We'll find out that's going to be very important in his life. But he was incredibly humble.

His knowledge and his understanding led to humility and, brothers and sisters, I think that's what it should do for us. We are very blessed at this church. We get a lot of incredible preaching and teaching. Pastor Ty does a wonderful job preaching the word every single week. We have wonderful teaching on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings and our Sunday morning Bible studies. Kids have great teachers except for one, which is me. We are so blessed here. You don't even understand how blessed you are. But if that teaching leads us to pride and leads us to becoming puffed up and arrogant, looking at how much we know versus what other people know, we have gotten it wrong. We haven't actually learned anything about this book because we're confident in ourselves and not in the Lord. Look to John's humility. He was the prophet that was about to prepare the way for the Messiah to come, and yet he said, "I am not even worthy to untie his sandal." What we know about God should humble us and bring us to our knees.

Turn over to John 1. This is when things start to get really interesting for John the Baptist. John 1 starting in verse 29,

29 The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him [this is John seeing him], and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John bore witness [this is the baptism account]: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

John has been waiting for this moment to happen. He spends a lot of his time in the wilderness. He's proclaiming the same message, "Repent and believe for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He is baptizing people to prepare them for his Savior's arrival. And then it happens and the way that he responds is just beautiful. I'm sure there were crowds standing all around him waiting to be baptized and he looks and he sees Jesus coming down the road and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God. That's him. It's not me. It's him. The Savior has come. He has come to take away the sins of the world." And at this moment he realizes his life has not been a lie. He has not wasted his time because Jesus came. The Savior came. He knew that the one who was going to save the sins of the world has come and he even says, "He ranks before me because he was before me." He's even confessing that Jesus is God himself.

So John's purpose in life was to prepare – we're just kind of bullet pointing here – it was to prepare for the arrival of the Savior and then he arrives. The Savior shows up. In other accounts we see a better depiction of the baptism account where John looks at Jesus and says, "I'm pretty sure this is supposed to be the other way around, you're supposed to baptize me." But Jesus says, "No, you baptize me," because he is going to inaugurate the arrival of the kingdom.

John had a life that was devoted to one particular cause, prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The angel that came to his parents would tell them that this was his life. His father would prophesy that this would be his life. And then his life matched that. He was devoted to him. It's the only thing he wanted to talk about. And just like when he was a child in his mother's womb, he was filled with joy when the Savior arrived. We should be filled with that kind of joy. When we experience our Savior, it both brings us to our knees in humility, but also in worship, that we delight in the coming of Christ, the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. But our knowledge of God and who he is and what he has called us to, as we will look at in just a moment, should not lead us to becoming puffed up with pride. It drives us deeper in dependence upon God.

John did not boast in his skills and his accomplishment. In fact, he was nothing that great. But he served the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He knew the Messiah was to come and so he did his job. He was confident in who his God was. It led him to not living the most comfortable life. The desert could not have been that easy. Eating locusts and honey

does not sound that appealing. But it didn't matter to him. All that mattered was he was in service to the Most High. I think that should be the same for us. What should matter most of all to us is that we are in service to the Most High, to Jesus Christ our Lord. No matter the situation or the circumstance, whether it's easy life or in hard life, we are called to remain faithful. We are called to be confident in who our God is and it leads us to action. But this is where the rubber meets the road.

The second thing that we see is that John had the confidence to take a stand. Turn with me to Matthew 11. In Matthew 11, we are going to see John in prison for what we later find out is because he looked at Herod in the face and said, "You cannot marry your brother's wife." But in Matthew 11, starting in verse 1, we read,

1 When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2 Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me." 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.

Wow. John is in prison. He's in prison in this moment. Here's what happens as we read earlier: Herod the king, this is the second Herod in a line of several Herod's, he was just as cruel as his father Herod the Great, and yet he was curious, specifically curious about John the Baptist. He heard John preach and teach several times, and he was amazed. He didn't listen to him, he was just interested in the way that the guy spoke. But Herod was a man marred by sin, as we'll see a lot more next week. He wanted his brother's wife, and so he took her and everyone in the land was disgusted by this. You can't do that. In Leviticus 20:21, it says, "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity." Right? So everyone is outraged at Herod for what he is doing. You can't do that, and yet he found her appealing, and so he wanted her, and he married her, and Herodias is not innocent in this either. She is a vile, despicable woman, as we will find out more next week.

But in this moment, John has a decision to make. Everyone is speaking out against Herod in some ways; mostly they're probably talking behind his back, saying, "How could he do something like this?" But Herod is celebrating sin. So what is John to do? John had a court before him. Herod had heard him speak several times. So what should he do? Does

he, A) do what everyone else is probably doing and talk about him behind his back, and then just go his separate way and say, "Well, I'll pray for him"? Or does he stand up and look at the king and say, "You can't have her." Which one is it? Well, as we see in the text, John stands up for the word of God. God stands up for truth, and I actually take this as a loving action on John's part. I don't think he is condescending and coming to the king and saying, "You can't have her." I don't think he's just trying to be a know-it-all and win the conversation. No, I genuinely think, out of love and a commitment to God's word, he goes to Herod and says, "You can't do this. You're breaking God's law. You are sinning against him." It takes courage and boldness to do this.

John takes a stand, and another way you could put this is he puts his money where his mouth is. He had been spending his entire life talking about the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords. He had been preparing the way for the Messiah to come. He had been building his life upon the word of God. But now where the rubber meets the road, he stands up. He does not cower back in fear. He does not leave Herod's sin to mere knowledge. "Well, I know that's wrong. It's not my place." He doesn't do that. He is convicted by God's word and out of a fear of the Lord and a love for God, and out of a love for his neighbor, he goes to Herod and says, "You cannot do this. You are sinning against the Lord." This is risky. Herod's father was not a nice man. Herod is not a nice man. They were known to be cruel, violent. Anyone that opposed them was put to death.

So John is taking a risk. To go before a cruel king and say, "What you're doing is wrong," was likely going to mean he would be punished and thrown in prison or even put to death. It was a great risk, a great challenge. So why did he do it? Why do it? Why risk so much? First of all, because of who God is. Right? Psalm 112:1 says, "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!" He feared the Lord. Now I've seen all of these clever t-shirts and sweatshirts that say, "Fear God, not man." Right? And it's a nice t-shirt. It's a nice saying. It's a nice feeling. But when the time comes, when the culture pushes back against you, when you get ridiculed and mocked for what you believe about Jesus, or let's go to other parts of the world where it's a little bit harder, when your life is on the line, when someone is threatening you to recant or die, what will you do? Will you fear man or will you fear God? John feared the Lord. He had a high and holy reverence for him and his commands. We see his commands all throughout the Old Testament. The law, the 10 Commandments where God proclaims how you walk with him, how you know him, how you do not sin against him. John took a stand for the word of God and he loved his neighbor.

Now one commentator said that in Matthew 11, John was beginning to doubt, which I don't really think is the case. So he sends messengers to Jesus to find out if he is the one, if there was someone else to come. The commentator wrote out that he was doubting, that he was very meek in this moment, fearful that he had been wrong. It just doesn't match up with the life of John and the way that he carried himself. I think in this moment, John's in prison, he knows he's likely going to die soon, and he wants to make sure, "Yeah, this is what my life was devoted to." And so he sends a messenger to Jesus and Jesus sends a messenger back and pretty much says, "Yeah, I'm the one." Think of the mercy of God in that moment, that John, who has spent his entire life devoted to God, committed to him, preparing the way for Jesus who came to save the sins of the world, he knows he is likely

about to die and he wants to make sure, "Is this it right here?" And God in his incredible mercy lets him know, "Yeah, this is the one who was promised." How good is our God, that John, right before the executioner took his head off, got to see a glimpse that this was the promised Savior.

And then we see that John is, in fact, beheaded by Herod. Turn back to Mark 6 and this is where we'll wrap up. Mark 6, this is where in verse 16,

16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

So it is Herod who beheads him, takes away his head. I struggled with this text. I was talking to Jack and Barbara this week about it, not necessarily struggling with what happens and how it transpires, but more like, we'll talk about this more next week, John spent his entire life devoted to God. He was confident in who God was. He knew what his mission was. Herod was not a man marked by a devotion to God. He's actually completely on the contrary. Sinned against the Lord time and time again and celebrated his sin. And in this moment, the good man dies and the guilty man lives, and it's always perplexed me. Why does John die in this way? It's just ridiculous to consider. Right? There's a party, Herod's trying to celebrate his sin. His stepdaughter dances in a very inappropriate way. Everyone likes it. She gets whatever she wants and now John's dead. And I just, "Why? Why is it this way? Why did John have to die in the first place?" And yet this week I was reminded in Isaiah where God says, "My purpose will stand." God had a purpose for John. His purpose was to inaugurate the coming of the kingdom of heaven. His purpose was to be the last of the Old Testament prophets to look forward to the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah came. His job was done. But he was faithful to the very end, literally to the last moment of his life, his dying breath, he was faithful to God because he knew who God was. He knew of the power of his God, the might, his glory, his splendor, his beauty. He wasn't afraid of anything else in this world. He did not fear anyone else. He feared the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that created the entire world. He delighted in him and was faithful to him until his head was gone. God's purpose will stand. He did his task. He served him to the very end.

Brothers and sisters, are we serving God in that way, or are we living as if we're just trying to buy time? "I'll coast here. I'll live comfortably. I'll live easily. Do what I want to do so that one day when I die, I will be in eternity. And then, and then, I will be completely faithful to God." That does not line up with the word of God. We're called to be faithful every single day until we're dead. When you wake up in the morning, it is your job to be faithful. And you will be challenged in that. Mothers, you will be challenged in rearing your children. It is not easy. I have watched my mom sacrifice so much for my sister and I. I have watched my mom struggle as we just did dumb things. And I have watched my mom get up earlier than all of us to make sure we had food on our plates, to make sure that we were awake enough so that we could prepare our hearts for the day ahead. The world is coming after your children. The enemy will not give you quarter, moms. He will not take it easy on you. He is going to come after you. He is going to come after your children, and it is your task, it is your role to be faithful, to make Christ plain in your home to your children. And in your every breath, you are to obey him,

follow him, serve him until your life is done on this earth. It is a high calling. It is a hard calling. And yet God is gracious enough to provide you the strength to do it every single day for his glory.

Brothers and sisters, we will be challenged in this life. Just as moms and children are being challenged, we are challenged by this world. Our culture does not like what we do every single week here. They do not like that we open the word of God. They do not like that we stand upon the convictions of the word of God. They don't like Jesus. I've had friends and family members offended that I even mentioned him. Around the world people are being put to death because of their faith in him. We are going to be challenged every single day, but who do you fear? Do you fear God or do you fear man?

Fear of God will lead to action. John was a man of action. He didn't just wait. He didn't just say, "Well, as soon as this, this, this, and this happens, then I'll get up and start proclaiming what I'm supposed to be proclaiming." He followed God. He knew God and he followed him to the ends of the earth to his dying breath. Are we that type of people? Will we take action? Will we stand up when the culture challenges our views and understandings of how God created marriage? Will we stand up when our culture challenges what a man is or what a woman is? Will we stand up when people argue, "No, God did not create. There is no God." Will we stand up when our brothers and sisters that are struggling with sin don't even realize it, will we love them enough to say something? Will we be people of action or do we just have filled heads and empty hearts?

Our confidence in God, our knowledge of who he is and what Christ has done for us leads us to action. Matthew 28:19 to 20 is our action plan. "Go and make disciples." That's our action plan. So will you do it? Do you have an unwavering confidence in God that no matter the challenge, no matter the risk, even if it means your life, your friends, your family, your comfort, whatever it is, will you stand upon the word of God? Will you act and will you echo the words of Martin Luther, "Here I stand and I can do no other. God help me." God help us all.

Let's pray.

*Lord, we are humbled by your grace that you have chosen to even reveal yourself to us. Lord, you have done far more than we could ever deserve. You have revealed yourself in your word. You have sent prophets to prepare the way for the coming Messiah, and then you sent the Messiah who purchased us and redeemed us to be your children. But Lord, I pray that our knowledge of who you are and of the gospel would not cause us to become puffed up with pride, would not cause us to be lazy and lethargic, but that it would drive us to our knees in humility, knowing that everything that we have is a gift from you and that you have called us to be faithful. We thank you for the example of John, who no matter the risk, no matter the challenge, was so confident in you that he was willing to stand up, to speak truth even though it meant his life. Lord, help us to be an acting people, not so that we can make our names known, not so that we can look good for what we're doing, but because we fear you and love you. Help us, God, to be faithful to you until our very last breath. Lord, we love you and we praise you. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.*